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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2978  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000395

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STATE PLEASE PASS TO WHITE HOUSE FOR THE PRESIDENT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2019  
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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: OVERVIEW FOR THE PRESIDENT'S JULY 14  
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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: OVERVIEW FOR THE PRESIDENT'S JULY 14  
MEETING WITH DUTCH PRIME MINISTER BALKENENDE  
Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael F. Gallagher for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Mr. President:

¶1. (C) Your July 14 meeting with Dutch Prime Minister Jan Pieter Balkenende provides an opportunity for us to urge the Dutch to continue as part of NATO in Afghanistan and to enlist PM Balkenende in solving Guantanamo issues. For his part, Balkenende will seek to continue the Dutch role in the G20 and to find a common ground to work with us on climate change and the Middle East.

¶2. (C) Balkenende, in office through four coalitions since 2002, is a cunning politician who does not impose his vision on coalition partners, but maneuvers effectively to achieve the intended goal. At first, he was dismissed as a lightweight "Harry Potter" look-alike, but he has consistently and skillfully delivered Cabinet support for U.S. policy objectives while balancing fragile parliamentary majorities. Balkenende's current center-left coalition government ("Balkenende IV") is held together more by fear of early elections than any unity of vision. The financial crisis has plunged the Netherlands into a recession likely to last through 2010, and the Cabinet must continually defend its three relatively modest stimulus packages against calls to do more to spur recovery. Balkenende is also under pressure from a skeptical public to withdraw the Netherlands, 1,800 troops from Afghanistan in 2010. His main coalition partner, the Labor Party, is in decline, having fared poorly in the 2006 national election and the 2009 European Parliament election, and believes rejecting a continuing role in Afghanistan will please its base and may win back supporters.

¶3. (S) The Wilders Factor: Golden-pompadoured, maverick parliamentarian Geert Wilders, anti-Islam, nationalist

Freedom Party remains a thorn in the coalition's side, capitalizing on the social stresses resulting from the failure to fully integrate almost a million Dutch Muslims, mostly of Moroccan or Turkish descent. In existence only since 2006, the Freedom Party, tightly controlled by Wilders, has grown to be the Netherlands second largest, and fastest growing, party. Recent polls suggest it could even replace Balkenende's Christian Democrats as the top party in 2011 parliamentary elections. Wilders is no friend of the U.S.: he opposes Dutch military involvement in Afghanistan; he believes development assistance is money wasted; he opposes NATO missions outside ""allied"" territory; he is against most EU initiatives; and, most troubling, he foments fear and hatred of immigrants.

¶4. (C) As a result of these currents, Balkenende's coalition finds itself in a precarious position and could fall within a year (most likely after municipal elections in March 2010). The Prime Minister is aware we want him to deliver continued Dutch boots on the ground in Afghanistan after 2010 and help with Guantanamo detainees. He knows there are high risks/expectations involved in his meeting with you, but we understand he is coming to offer as much as he thinks he can deliver at this time.

¶5. (S) Balkenende, a long-time champion of U.S.-Dutch relations, seeks to establish a strong relationship with you and capitalize on your popularity. The Dutch public overwhelmingly supported your election in November, and you remain hugely popular here as a beacon of change. Balkenende will encourage you to view the long arc of the U.S.-Dutch relationship, not just current bumps in the road (e.g. the likely drawdown of Dutch forces in Afghanistan after 2010). He wants you to see the Netherlands as America's friend and partner, with significant Dutch contributions to our shared foreign policy priorities: Dutch military presence in Afghanistan and support for NATO; support for U.S. intervention in Iraq; active participation in the EU, NATO, and other multilateral institutions; substantial and sustained foreign development assistance; and a long-standing commitment to promoting human rights, tolerance, and the rule of law. And, he will ask you for a seat at the G-20 table in Pittsburgh as well as for a meeting at the White House in September for the Crown Prince.

¶6. (C) Balkenende will use your private, one-on-one session to highlight your shared personal values and experiences. He believes social organizations are more effective in promoting change than government. His philosophy is that we must treat one another with dignity and respect as we live and work together. Your Father's Day call for fathers to accept more responsibility in the rearing of their children resonated with him. Balkenende will also likely use the one-on-one session to pinpoint the political difficulties of the deliverables we are seeking. Rather than cover a laundry list of topics, the Dutch want the larger meeting to focus on 1) Afghanistan/Pakistan, 2) the future of the global economic system (including the role of the G20 and how to help developing countries), 3) the Middle East Peace Process/Iran, and 4) climate change. The Prime Minister is anticipating other key foreign policy issues (e.g. human rights, Russia, NATO, non-proliferation, energy security, 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage to Manhattan - NY400) can be covered by staff or only briefly mentioned to stay focused on the major issues. Two cables will follow which will expand on these topics.

GALLAGHER